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Historically Inaccurate

by [asocialfauxpas \(fuzzytomato\)](#)

Summary

Stiles is surprisingly okay with all the weird shit that goes on at Beacon City Historic Ghost Town - ghost lights, howling, pianos playing on their own. Having to work closely with the surly blacksmith is another matter.

Notes

Thank you E, S & V for all the help and encouragement. This fic is for the TW Fall Harvest Community. :)

Beacon City was a ghost town.

Well, a ghost town in the sense that it was abandoned by the populace in the 1880s, not like a ghost town which housed actual ghosts. At least, Stiles hadn't experienced any ghost-like activity.

Except for that one time he heard the phantom carriage wheels ambling down the street behind him, but he had just finished an evening program that detailed the court trial and subsequent hanging of some gold rush murderers. He had been explicit when talking about the rattle of the carriage that had taken the culprits from the jail to the hanging site just outside of town.

Showmanship: it's what the Hales paid him for. Anyway, the sound of the wheels following him afterward as he walked to his car had definitely been his mind playing tricks on him. Definitely.

Maybe.

Well, and there was that one time with all the howling. And that other time when the piano in the saloon played a lively tune while the building was locked up tight and no one was around. And those few times with the lantern light that bobbed down the street on its own.

Okay, so there had been some weird shit going on at Beacon City Historic Ghost Town.

Anyway, other than that those few times, Stiles had not experienced any ghost activity in the five years he had guided tours.

And that is just what he told the visitors.

The group in front of him was filled with five-year-olds and their parents from the local kindergarten class.

A little girl's hand shot up as soon as he asked if there were any questions before they started. She wore her red hair pulled back in braids and had freckles on her cheeks and was *adorable*.

"Yes, the little girl in the front," Stiles said, pointing at her. "Do you have a question?"

"Are there actual ghosts here?"

Stiles smiled. "Nope. Ghost town just means that the town was abandoned and left behind."

"Oh," she said, with a frown. "Why'd everybody leave?"

"Good question. I promise I'll answer that by the end of the tour." He smiled at her and she blushed and twirled the toe of her shoe in the dirt. "Any other questions?"

One of the mom's in the back raised her hand. "Is the blacksmith shop going to be on the tour?"

The women tittered and Stiles plastered a fake smile on his face and did his very best not to roll his eyes. Of course, the legend of Derek Hale, the smoking hot blacksmith who was usually shirtless, had already infiltrated the ranks. "Yes, we'll be going by the blacksmith, the schoolhouse, the post office, the jail and the stables."

It was only a half-day tour. He'd take the kids around in the morning and they'd eat a picnic lunch out by the grassy area near the entrance when he was done. The town itself was much bigger than those five sites, but five-year-olds had short attention spans. It also meant that Stiles only had a half-day as tour guide before he'd be sent off to do other things around the historic area.

"Okay! Before we go," Stiles said, bending closer to the kids, "some quick rules. Don't touch things unless I touch them first, okay? And watch where you step! Those horses are real and so are the things they leave behind. There are plenty of better souvenirs in the shops." The kids laughed. Poop jokes were Stiles' wheelhouse. "You guys ready?"

The kids let out a chorus of yells and Stiles grinned wide.

"Okay, follow me!"

Stiles knew his opening by heart. He'd had it down since he had started working part time at the historic site in high school on the weekends. Now, he worked during the summer and on his vacations from college. He had just finished the spring semester of his junior year and this was his first tour back. He loved leading little kids around, but he'd only get to do it for a month longer. Then the summer crowd would come in and Stiles would be forced into his nineteenth century

costume and stuck hanging around the street giving directions and answering questions to the sweaty and irritated masses.

He liked the little kids better.

“Beacon City was founded by Micah Hale back in 1848 when California was just getting settled,” he said, stopping in front of the Sheriff’s office. “He found gold and with his family he not only started a mining operation, but a whole town. Soon others followed and Beacon City was a boomtown for the next forty years. The town became a hub for trade and grew to have its own sheriff and post office and even its own bank! We are standing on Main Street, also known as Gold Road, and right here is the jail. When we go in, Deputy Allison is going to tell you all about it and may even lock you in the cells.”

The kids cheered and Stiles led them inside. Deputy Allison was waiting for them with a dimpled smile and fake pistols strapped to her hips.

As tours went, this one was a breeze. The kids loved Allison’s badge and the cells and asked her all kinds of questions about thieves. She kept it light for the age group and by the end of her spiel several little girls wanted to grow up and be deputies. They hit the post office next and Isaac explained about the mail system and postmarked a Beacon City postcard for each kid. Then they went to the schoolhouse with Erica where she showed them the slate tablets and let them sit in the desks.

The next stop was the blacksmith.

The blacksmith’s shop was set back a little off Gold Road, closer to the stables, and away from everything. Stiles knew it was because of the risk of fire and the wall of heat that surrounded the forge, but he liked to think it was because of Derek Hale’s personality. For someone who worked in the tourism industry, he really didn’t like interacting with people, and it showed.

Or maybe he just hated interacting with Stiles. Or especially Stiles. Whatever. It didn’t matter, because what Derek lacked in personality, he made up for in sheer hotness.

“Okay, kids,” Stiles said as they stood at the mouth of the path that led to down to Derek’s, “this is really important. I need everyone to hold out their hands in front of them, like this.” Stiles held out his hands and wiggled his fingers. The kids complied, giggling, and doing the same. “Okay, now I need everyone to put their hands behind their backs.” The kids followed Stiles’ example. “Great. You guys are naturals. We do this because Blacksmith Derek does not like people touching the things in the shop. It’s really hot in there and you might burn your fingers on something. So let’s keep our hands behind us and just listen with our ears and watch with our eyes.”

The blacksmith’s shop wasn’t really a shop. It had a roof over the two brick forges and a wide wooden waist-high shelf that ran across the front that acted as a barrier and a work surface. The sides were left open during the summer to bleed off the heat. A gate stretched across the brick path that led to the back of the lean-to marked with **employees only**.

Stiles led his group to the forge and nearly laughed when Derek came into sight. Well, he would’ve laughed if the sight of Derek wasn’t like a punch to the gut. Derek wore leather gloves, buckskin trousers, and a large leather apron to shield him from the heat, but his fucking shirt seemed to have gotten lost. He was hammering a horse shoe into shape, the metal ringing loud, but Stiles could still hear the gasps from the mothers and one of the dads in his group.

Stiles swore one of them was going to swoon.

He didn’t blame them. Derek’s muscles flexed with the work. His abs were pieces of art in

themselves, but add his shoulders, his biceps, and the strong line of his back and he was an orgasm in physical form. He was the flawless fucking combination of sweaty and sooty and stubbled perfection. He was the source of many of Stiles' inappropriate boners.

Too bad he wasn't very talkative.

Luckily Boyd appeared from the back of the structure and smiled. He worked as Derek's apprentice and was probably the only person other than Derek's family who could stand his *sunny* personality. Boyd wore a shirt, thank god for small mercies since the combination of the two of them would surely send someone over the edge, and he addressed the group.

"For a mining town, the blacksmiths were really important. They made horseshoes and nails and locks and did repairs. Our forge is a working forge, which means everything we make here gets used somewhere in the town or sold in one of the shops."

Derek kept working and ignored them all. On cue, as Boyd was talking about melting temperatures, Derek pulled the completed horseshoe out of the fire. He slipped a piece of paper out of his back pocket, which unfairly hugged the curves of his ass, and held it up to the glowing red metal. It instantly caught on fire and the kids oohed excitedly. Derek dropped the flaming paper into the bucket of water by his feet. The horseshoe followed and steam hissed up into his face enveloping him in a cloud so he looked like he belonged on the cover of a romance novel.

So fucking unfair.

The group clapped as Derek held up the cooling horseshoe. He didn't say anything, his face set in his devastatingly handsome perma-scowl as he tossed the horseshoe on a stack in the back. Then he went back to work.

"Thanks Boyd," Stiles said once Boyd had fielded all the kids' questions. "And thanks Derek!" he called. "Great conversation as always. Really. Your interpretation was spot on."

Derek's eyebrows furrowed and he glared, his pale green eyes catching the sunlight. Stiles smiled wide, and ushered his group away before Derek saw fit to impale him with something.

"Now to the stables!"

The horses were always the kids' favorite part and Stiles knew part of it was because Scott was so enthusiastic about them it fed into the hysteria. It also helped that Scott let them pet old docile Betty's nose, even though it was kind of against company policy. At the end of Scott's twenty minutes, Stiles literally had to tear the kids away and lead them back to the Visitor's Center and their buses.

"Okay," Stiles said, clapping to get their attention, "so here's the end of the story. In 1881, there was a big fire at the Hale mansion at the end of town. It burned and several of the Hale family died. No one knows what caused the fire, but after, the Hale family moved from Beacon City to a new spot. Once the incoming railroad learned the Hales had moved, they decided to bypass Beacon City and built the depot where Beacon Hills sits today. Beacon City declined into ghost town status and the buildings were left to ruin until the next generation of Hales bought the land and converted it into a working historical site."

By this point, the kindergartners were all squirming and Stiles' knew they were ready for lunch and naptime. No one usually asked questions by this point so Stiles just pointed back toward the Visitor Center building.

"The gift shop is that way."

The kids cheered and ran off, the parents trailing behind them. A few teachers stayed behind and asked questions, gave Stiles a tip and a snack, which was always appreciated, before they too headed to the shop.

Once the group was out of sight, Stiles blew out a breath and walked back to the stables.

Scott was on lunch when he got there, sitting behind the barn in a shaded patch of grass. Stiles plopped beside him and bit into his apple.

“Rough tour?” Scott asked, handing over an extra bottle of water.

Stiles swallowed. “Not at all, just trying to get back into the swing of things.”

“Yeah. They were cute kids though.”

“Fucking adorable,” Stiles agreed. “They loved Betty.”

Scott grinned and puffed out his chest. “*Everyone* loves Betty.”

“She should be on all the postcards. Seriously. Not stupid McHottie Blacksmith.”

Scott laughed. “Ah, your Derek hate-crush is showing. Isn’t it a little early in the season?”

Stiles fell dramatically backward and splayed out his arms in the cushion of grass. He knew he was probably getting grass stains on the back of his white polo shirt, but he didn’t care.

“Did he get hotter while I was away? And like more standoffish? Did both of those things happen?”

Scott shrugged. “He talks to me. He talks to Isaac and Boyd and Erica.”

Stiles rolled over and propped his head up on his hand. “So it *is* just me.”

“Maybe?” Scott said, but he looked down and picked at a loose thread on his Lydia-issued costume trousers. Bless Scott and his inability to tell the truth when it might hurt someone’s feelings. But they had been friends since fourth grade and Stiles knew all of Scott’s tells.

Stiles sighed. He had his answer.

It looked like another summer of sexual frustration at the strong, calloused hands of Derek Hale. At least Stiles wouldn’t spend this summer pining, like he had every single summer since he’d started working at the ghost town. He’d get over Derek and his muscles and his ridiculous chiseled jaw. He could do that.

“I have to get back to the horses,” Scott said, standing.

Stiles rolled to his back and sat up. “Yeah, I have to go check in with Laura at the Visitor’s Center.”

Scott grabbed his large battered hat and squished it on his head. “Want to go for dinner later?”

“Sure. I’ll meet you in the parking lot after work.”

“Awesome. Later.”

“Later.”

Stiles stood and brushed off the back of his pants. He adjusted his name tag and made sure the piece of tape that said STILES in large block letters still covered his freakishly long Polish name.

He sighed. He could do this. He could go one summer without feeling personally victimized by Derek.

That could happen.

Maybe.

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The Visitor's Center was an air-conditioned heavenly place.

It housed a small photo exhibit and the ticket sellers. And while each exhibit building out in the town had its own break area, the Center had a large one with snack machines and couches. Stiles loved making use of those couches to catch a cat nap when he stayed up too late the night before a tour playing video games.

Stiles entered the building through the back employee entrance then ducked into the operation offices.

Laura Hale ran the school group operations and a large portion of the town. She was Stiles' direct supervisor and Stiles kind of adored her. She possessed those freaky perfect Hale genes, but not in a scary way, like Derek, and she took care of her employees. She was the one who had plucked Stiles from the gift shop and a life of stocking souvenirs into leading tours.

He poked his head into her office and she looked up from her computer screen, long black hair falling into her face. She brushed it away and smiled.

"Hey, Stiles," she said. "How was your first tour back?"

"Great. The kids were awesome and the parents behaved themselves."

"That's what I like to hear," she said while rifling through a pile of papers. She found the one she was looking for and brandished it in Stiles' direction. "Here is your schedule for the rest of May and first part of June. Today, for the afternoon, could you run a few errands for me?"

Stiles glanced at the schedule. It consisted of mostly days with kids until school let out in June and a few night programs scattered throughout. The Hales never scheduled night programs on certain days of the month. Something about family traditions? Stiles hadn't really paid attention in staff orientation and that was a long time ago.

"Yeah, sure. What do you need?"

Laura lit up and began piling a bunch of papers into a manila folder. "Oh, thank goodness. You have no idea how helpful this is to me. It saves me a trip out to the blacksmith."

Stiles stiffened, the paper in his hand suddenly crinkling. Fuck. The blacksmith. Literally.

Laura didn't notice his distress. She handed the folder to Stiles.

"Can you take inventory of what Derek has stockpiled in there? I need to know what he's made because the gift shops are clamoring at me about their stock being low and summer hasn't even hit yet. If you could look at what they need versus what Derek may have already completed? And then bring them back to me?"

Stiles flipped open the order from the gift shop and scanned it, trying not to think about an entire afternoon stuck with Scowly McGrump, but he could handle it. He could so handle it. At least Boyd would be there.

“The Derek and Boyd postcard out again?” he said with a grin.

Laura laughed. “You have no idea how much that one gets reprinted.”

Oh, he had an idea. He had specific ideas. Lots and lots of detailed ideas, fantasies even.

“Anyway, it might take a couple of afternoons to complete the job, but you only have morning tours for the next few days.”

Stiles’ heart sunk. *Days?* Days of working near Derek? Fuck. Nevermind. He hated Laura. He was going to sue her for unfit working conditions or for torture. Actual torture. He was going to *quit*.

“Sure,” he said instead.

“Awesome. You are a model employee.”

That was Stiles. Model employee and hopelessly in lust with his boss’ brother.

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Stiles had first noticed Derek when Stiles was a sophomore in high school. It wasn’t that he didn’t know Derek before that. Everyone knew the Hales. But that year, Stiles was paired with Cora, Derek’s younger sister, in Chemistry. That meant Stiles spent a few days per week over at the Hale mansion studying. He met the whole family, including creepy Uncle Peter, and became a regular at dinner on days he and Cora wrote up their lab work.

He’d gotten lost one time in the labyrinthine second floor and accidentally walked in on Derek wearing only a towel.

It had been a revelation.

A second coming.

For Stiles.

Derek had just been annoyed and shoved Stiles out of the room, the towel perilously, *deliciously*, close to falling off the jut of his hips. Derek had slammed the door in Stiles’ face. Cora had laughed and laughed.

Derek and Stiles had run into each other after that. It was a small town. Things happened. People knew people. And Derek was never really friendly, but it didn’t get *weird* until later.

Until after Stiles started working for Beacon City.

Until after that one random night with the howling and the panic attack.

Stiles shrugged it off. If Derek wanted to be a complete asshole, that was his business. Stiles had work to do. Lots of work to do if the inventory sheet was any indication.

Stiles skirted past the group of tourists currently ogling Boyd and slipped through the gate. The brick path led past the shop and curved around to the back where a second building stood. Stiles

pulled on the heavy wooden door and slipped inside.

The blacksmith back building didn't house much. It had a small sturdy table in the middle and a set of shelves on one wall where Derek and Boyd stashed their belongings during the work day. Since it wasn't an exhibition site, it had electricity, which was a plus, and a small sink area for cleaning up. There was a light overhead and a small college-sized fridge on the floor humming away.

It also currently housed Derek Hale, which was less than ideal.

Derek had his head tipped back, sucking down a bottle of water like he was a man in a desert, his throat bared and bobbing, sweat dripping down over his collarbone. He hadn't even flinched when Stiles entered, but once his water was gone, he pulled the bottle away and swiped the sleeve of his light linen shirt over his mouth.

Stiles knew his own mouth was hanging open, but he didn't really care. Until Derek leveled a glare at him.

"What are you doing in here?" he said, tossing his bottle in the recycling bin.

"I see you found a shirt," Stiles answered, because well, Derek was actually wearing a shirt and that was something that needed noting.

Derek blinked at the non sequitur and then frowned.

"You didn't answer my question." He took a step forward, boots thumping on the wooden floor. "Why are you in here?"

Stiles pulled his shoulders back. "To bother you obviously. It has absolutely nothing to do with my job." He waved the folder of papers in Derek's face. "It's not like your sister, my boss by the way, sent me or anything."

Derek's eyes crossed at the papers flapping in front of his nose. He scowled, took a step back and then snatched the papers out of Stiles' hand. He flipped the folder open and if possible his scowl deepened, his eyebrows drawing together.

Stiles grinned. "See? Totally official business."

"How in the hell did they go through everything already?" he muttered.

"Don't ask me, I'm just the messenger."

Derek huffed. He handed the folder back and crossed his arms. "I guess you want to see what we have on hand."

"Obviously."

"All right. Follow me."

Derek crossed the small room to a door Stiles hadn't noticed before, tucked into the corner. Derek gestured to it and crossed his arms, biceps bulging. Stiles tried not to stare too hard because he didn't want to be eviscerated.

"It's all in there."

Stiles pointed at the door, eyebrow raised. "In there?"

“Yes.”

He eyed it. It looked like a closet, but Derek was being too accommodating and that made Stiles wary. He reached out and pulled on the knob and swung the door open.

He immediately wished he hadn't.

The cloud of dust that enveloped him made him sneeze several times in succession, but it was the absolute mess inside that made his heart sink.

It was a walk-in storage area, which was actually pretty nice considering it looked like a tornado had ripped through it. Boxes were stacked on top of each other with no discernible organizational system and loose pieces of *stuff* were crammed on shelves and scattered across the floor. It was chaos.

“Are you *serious*? What the fuck? When was the last time anyone was even out here to look at this stuff? Do you and Boyd just shove shit in here? Is there any rhyme or reason to anything?”

Derek moved closer, his chest a wall of heat against Stiles' back, which was impressive considering the stifling temperature. Stiles felt every hair on his body stand at attention as Derek looked over his shoulder into the abyss, his breath a hot puff against Stiles' ear.

“No,” Derek said and Stiles shivered, indignation taking a back seat to the fact that Derek was standing so close. “Also, I think something might be living in there. Be careful.”

Derek clapped his hand on Stiles' shoulder *hard* before he pulled away and headed back outside.

“Have fun,” Derek called.

“Yeah, thanks a lot,” Stiles shot back.

Stiles heard Derek's low chuckle as he closed the door and Stiles bit his lip to keep himself focused. He could get lost in that sound, sink into it and live, but he needed all his concentration because this was a mess.

Stiles sighed and gingerly stepped into the closet to pull out the first box.

Time to get to work.

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Three hours later and Stiles' hands were blackened with dirt and his shirt was wet with sweat. There really was no method to the madness that was the closet and after hauling out the first box and finding a mixture of horseshoes, nails, hinges and locks Stiles knew he had to implement a system of organization before he could even start doing the job Laura sent him to do.

He was also pretty sure that Derek hadn't been joking about something living in there.

He wiped his brow with the back of his wrist and sighed. The small building was hot and Stiles had managed to push open one of the windows to provide a small breeze. The rhythm of Derek's hammer against metal outside provided a steady background beat to his work. It was soothing while he sorted through items and tried to figure out what to do.

Beacon City Historic Ghost Town closed at six and at approximately five fifty-five the door to the building opened. Boyd shuffled in. He stopped in front of Stiles and the boxes and raised an eyebrow.

“Do I want to know?”

Stiles snorted. “No.”

“Okay, then.”

Boyd stepped around the mess on the floor and gathered his things. Stiles heard Derek come in a few minutes later, but opted not to look up from the paperwork in front of him. He knew it was petty to ignore Derek, but well, he was going to do it anyway.

That was until Stiles heard the unmistakable sound of metal dropped against metal. He snapped his head up, eyes wide, his neat box of nails, which Stiles had painstakingly counted not an hour before, was no longer very neat.

Stiles gasped.

“What did you just do?” Stiles accused.

Derek crossed his arms and frowned. “Added the nails Boyd and I made today.”

Stiles jumped to his feet, his chair scraping across the wood floor. “Why would you *do* that? I just finished counting those!”

“Because it was a pile of nails? I added nails to the pile of nails, Stiles.” Derek said pointing to the bunch of nails.

“Well, thanks. You’ve just messed up at least an hour of my hard work.”

Derek’s eyebrows climbed into his hair. “Hard work? You’ve made a mess.”

Stiles shoved a finger into Derek’s muscled chest. “No, I didn’t make a mess. You made the mess. This is my attempt at cleaning up.” The *after you* was heavily implied.

Derek smacked Stiles’ hand away. “Your attempt sucks.”

“You know, I don’t know why I even bother talking to you.”

“Does that mean you’ll stop at some point?”

“You’re such a jerk! I’ve spent my afternoon in this stifling room, sweating like a pig, and counting those fucking nails and... you know what. Nevermind.” Stiles tugged at the collar of his shirt and hastily gathered the papers into a stack. He rubbed a hand in his sweaty hair. “I’m leaving.”

Stiles grabbed his things and stepped around Derek, giving him his best glare.

And he didn’t stop even though he tripped over a stack of horseshoes on his way out.

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“And *then* he screwed up my count and didn’t even apologize!”

Stiles collapsed back into the booth at the diner, arms splayed, chest heaving.

Scott stared at him over his chocolate milkshake. Allison sat next to Scott, lips pursed. Stiles shoved a handful of fries into his mouth and chewed while Allison and Scott exchanged a look.

“What?” Stiles asked.

Scott shrugged. “It sounds like an honest mistake.”

“You’re taking his side?”

“There really isn’t a side, Stiles,” Allison said. She brushed a lock of hair behind her ear. “I think maybe you guys got off on the wrong foot.”

“So he’s been standing on the wrong foot for five years?”

Allison winced.

“No, that’s not what I mean. Derek is pretty quiet and you’re....”

“Not,” Scott supplied after Allison trailed off.

Stiles leaned forward, elbows on the table. “Seriously? That’s what you’re going with? My volume?”

Allison shook her head. “No, that’s not it. You’re persistent. Observant. Derek likes to keep things to himself. You probably intimidate him.”

Stiles scoffed. “Yeah, I intimidate the guy with the muscles bigger than my head.”

“She has a point.” Scott turned to Allison and smiled.

Stiles rolled his eyes. Scott and Allison weren’t dating, so they said, but the amount of puppy-dog looks thrown between them in the course of an hour said otherwise. It was sickening. Stiles was not at all jealous. Really. Except, okay, maybe he’d like someone to look at him like that at some point in his life and not just generally scowl in his direction.

“You know,” Allison said after she had taken a sip of her strawberry milkshake, “I always thought Derek liked you.”

Stiles scoffed. “Yeah, right.”

“No, I’m serious. Sometimes when you’re leading a tour, he watches you.”

“Probably to make sure I’m being historically accurate.”

Allison shook her head. “No, I think he likes watching you with the kids. It is pretty adorable. Also, I think he stares at your ass.”

Scott choked on his milkshake and Allison thumped his back a few times.

“I’m fine,” Scott croaked. “I’m fine.” He held up a hand. “I just, wow, he really does do that, doesn’t he?”

“Not you too,” Stiles said. He stared down at his fries and drew shapes in his ketchup. It was a nice thought that Derek might like him, but Stiles knew better. “Can we possibly not talk about Derek Hale? I’m going to get enough interaction at work.”

“Hey,” Scott said lightly, kicking Stiles under the table. Stiles kicked back. “It’s only for a few days, right? Grin and bear it and come bug me on your breaks.”

“Yeah, okay. I can do this. I totally can.”

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“I can’t do this,” Stiles groaned as he walked toward the blacksmith shop.

His last tour had been a breeze – third graders and all he had to do was take them to the gem mining site and let them experience panning for gold.

They’d all gotten wet and laughed and squealed when they found the planted pyrite. Fool’s gold was probably the second highest selling item in the gift shops, after Derek’s postcard of course.

The gem mining area was shaded and the water coming down the chutes from the stream was cool. It was perfect, especially on the first really hot day of the year. The air was scorching and in the short walk to the blacksmith, Stiles was already dripping with sweat.

Just the thought of being locked up in the small wooden building in the stifling heat made Stiles want to quit. He wouldn’t though. He wasn’t going to give Muscles McBroody the satisfaction.

Upon entering the room, Stiles knew something was different. It wasn’t the mess. That was still there. It was a loud hum - a loud hum accompanied by a breeze.

Stiles tripped over the horseshoes again, but he didn’t fucking care. In fact, it actually propelled him forward and that meant he could worship at the foot of the goddess of the oscillating fan that much quicker.

“Oh my god,” he breathed reverently, as he shoved his face as close to the fan head as possible. His nose lightly bumped the plastic cage around the blades and his eyes dried out from the full blast of air into his face, but it was *awesome*. “Where have you been all my life?” The fan moved and Stiles moved with it, placing a finger against white plastic. “Shhh, it’s okay. We’re together now.”

“Should I leave you two alone?”

Stiles flailed backwards and almost landed on his ass in a box. He clutched his hand over his heart, his eyes wide, his face flushed.

“Warn a guy, would you?”

Derek smirked. “Do you like the fan?”

“Well yeah. We’re getting married. Didn’t you hear? You were eavesdropping.”

Derek smiled then and Stiles felt wrong-footed, imbalanced, *weird*.

Derek crossed the room to the small fridge and grabbed a water. “It’s not eavesdropping when you make enough noise to wake the dead.” He twisted off the cap and took a long drink. Stiles had to look away. He studied the paperwork fluttering with every rotation of the fan. A horseshoe had been placed on the stack by some conscientious person to keep the papers in place.

Stiles swallowed. “Well, I didn’t hear you.”

“Because you were kissing the fan.”

“I wasn’t kissing it. I was just... expressing my appreciation.”

Derek snorted. He took a sip of his water and wiped his mouth on the back of his long sleeve. He was wearing a shirt today, and Stiles should’ve felt bereft, but the neck was open wide, the first

two buttons completely undone, and the third barely flirted with the buttonhole. It gave Stiles a tantalizing view of the hollow of Derek's throat, his collarbones and a small sliver of his chest. If he wanted, he could track the progress of the sweat drops sliding down Derek's skin, but he didn't want to. Really. Seriously.

He was going to marry the fucking fan, he needed to stop perving on Derek.

"Don't you have work to do?" Stiles shot at Derek, irritated, as he anxiously fluttered around the table and his stacks of merchandise.

Derek tossed his empty water bottle into the recycle bin. "Don't you?" he countered.

"I asked you first."

Derek's mouth curved down into a frown. He looked pissed. This – this was familiar ground and Stiles felt relieved. "Boyd needs a break," he said, voice soft, confused. He took a breath, clenched his hands at his side. "Enjoy the fan." This time his voice came out harder, more Derek-like, and he left the small building with a solid slam of the door.

Stiles sat down and went back to organizing, labeling boxes, writing out instructions for Derek and Boyd to follow and tried not to think about the frustrated expression on Derek's face.

A few minutes later, Boyd came in. He headed for the fridge as well. Stiles hunched over his work, but could feel Boyd's disappointed glare burning into his shoulders.

"What the fuck did you do?" Boyd asked.

Stiles shrugged. "Nothing." Well, he must've done something, judging by the incessant ringing sounds coming from the forge as Derek worked.

"And when did we get a fan?"

Stiles looked up so quickly, he almost gave himself whiplash. "What?"

Boyd took a long swallow of his water and twisted the cap back on. He put it back in the fridge. "I'm going back out there just to make sure he doesn't scare any of the tourists. Laura wouldn't like a complaint."

Boyd walked back out, the door closing much softer than when Derek left.

Stiles slouched in his chair, his insides knotting, and not even the brisk breeze from the oscillating fan made him feel better – a fan that Derek had obviously brought in for Stiles' benefit. Stiles didn't know why he had done it – it could have been just to keep Stiles from complaining about the heat, but whatever the intent, it was a nice gesture.

And Stiles had been a jerk.

Fuck.

He groaned, pushing back from the table. He stood and headed back outside. There was a small gathering of tourists talking with Boyd, and Derek was off to the side on his own.

"Hey," Stiles said, coming to stand close. He clenched his hands in his pockets.

Derek looked up and went back to the forge, shoving whatever he was working on back into the flames. "What now, Stiles?"

“Nothing. Nothing. I just wanted to say thanks for the fan.”

Derek raised an eyebrow.

“I’m serious,” Stiles said. “It’s going to make my life a lot easier. So, you know, thanks.”

Derek looked down, his eyelashes fanned on his cheeks, his expression looking slightly eased. “You’re welcome.”

“Okay.” Stiles took a stumbling step back and jerked his thumb over his shoulder. “I have work to go do in my nice new cooler spot.”

Derek nodded and Stiles walked quickly back to the building so Derek wouldn’t see him blushing.

-

A few days into the assignment, Stiles found a motherfucking weather vane in the back of the closet. An honest to God rooster perched on cardinal directions weather vane. It was unexpected and kind of ornate and gorgeous and fucking heavy and what the fuck was it doing in there? Stiles dragged it out and propped it against the wall. He shook his head and went back into the closet to find more locks.

Two hours later and Stiles’ stomach growled. He tried to ignore it, like he tried to ignore Derek’s lack of shirt, but the more he worked, the louder it got and the more his insides felt like they were caving in. There was another two hours until quitting time and he just wasn’t going to make it. He needed food. He needed a break anyway. The numbers on his papers were starting to blur.

Beacon City Historic Ghost Town had the historic saloon, which was also a working restaurant that served lunch and dinner. Attached to the side of it was a small bakery. It wasn’t very historically accurate, but Stiles didn’t care because they made the best lemon squares Stiles had ever tasted and they were calling to him.

He slipped out of the building and made a large circle around the back and up another alley to avoid the forge. The bakery wasn’t far down the street. He waved to Scott who passed by with Betty pulling a wagon filled with tourists and to Allison who stood on the boardwalk outside of the Sheriff’s office showing off her vintage handcuffs to a few kids.

The bakery was quiet when Stiles ducked in. Cora, the youngest of the Hales, was behind the case filling up a few cups of lemonade. She looked up when Stiles came in and gave him a small smile.

“Be right with you, Stiles.”

“Awesome. Thanks.”

While he waited, he looked around. The lemon squares sat behind the counter on wax paper next to a pile of fresh ginger cakes. The smell wafted to him and his mouth watered. The lemon squares were his favorite but the ginger cakes were a close second, especially when they were fresh.

Cora came over. She was in costume, her apron snug around her waist, draped over a set of full nineteenth century skirts. Her long black hair was pulled back in a tight bun. She was every inch a Hale, complete with the Hale attitude, but she looked more like their mom with her dark brown eyes while Laura and Derek favored their dad.

“What have you been up to?” She gestured to Stiles’ shirt smeared with dust.

“Hanging with the blacksmiths.”

Cora pursed her lips. “With Derek?”

Stiles shrugged, hands in his pockets. “Yeah, kind of. Laura sent me over there to do some inventory. It’s only for a few days.”

“That sounds like a special kind of hell.”

“You have no idea.”

“Oh, I do. He’s my brother, remember?”

“Yeah. You have my sympathies.”

She smirked. “Anyway, what do you want?”

“Lemon squares.”

Cora turned and packaged up a few squares and slid them into a brown paper bag. “Anything else? The ginger cakes are fresh.”

“I know. I smelled them as soon as I walked in.”

“They’re Derek’s favorite.”

Stiles narrowed his eyes and cocked his head to the side. Cora was about as delicate as a brick to the face. Subtlety wasn’t her strong suit. “Uh huh.”

“Just saying it might ease the way if you know what I mean.”

Stiles tried not to immediately jump to innuendo, but he couldn’t help it, and he blushed. Cora smiled sweetly, but Stiles could see right through it. He’d known her all through high school and knew the sarcastic, cunning and sometimes cruel personality that hid underneath her pretty face.

“Fine. Give me four of those, too.”

Cora grabbed them and threw them in the bag. “You’re so easy.”

“Yeah, yeah. Make with the food, Hale.”

-

By the side of the forge sat a large barrel. It was tall and in the way and Stiles wasn’t really sure why it existed. He thought that it was there to possibly add to the ambiance of the scene, but it didn’t make much sense. Derek and Boyd were blacksmiths, not coopers, and the barrel only served to be an enticement for little kids to climb on.

While the presence of the barrel was perplexing, it was actually pretty useful.

Stiles hoisted himself up onto it, brown bag from the bakery clutched in his hand. His feet dangled against the wood, heels thumping and making a hollow sound.

Derek looked up from hammering a horseshoe into shape.

“Get down, Stiles.”

Stiles crinkled the bag in his hand loudly. He opened it and pulled out a lemon square. He slowly brought it to his mouth, tapped it against his lips then sunk his teeth into the powdery, flaky goodness. A little moan slipped out as he chewed and he let his eyes flutter closed for a moment.

When he opened them, Derek had stopped hammering, and his eyes were wide. Stiles smiled, licked his lips, gathered the sugar still clinging there with his tongue.

Derek's stare could've lit Stiles on fire. Stiles knew Derek could probably smell the fresh ginger cakes, the scent wafting from the bag, especially since Stiles leaned closer. He hummed and took another bite.

"Don't you have work to do," Derek asked, voice rough. He turned back to the horseshoe and shoved it recklessly back into the flames.

"Just say you want it, Derek. It's okay."

Derek dropped his hammer and spun on his heel, mouth open, brow furrowed. He looked flushed, cheeks pinked.

"What?" Derek asked again, his voice breathy.

Stiles waved the bag in Derek's face, grinning slyly. "If you want a ginger cake, just ask."

Derek opened his mouth then snapped it shut, his expression morphing from confused to irritated. He growled. He honestly growled and Stiles could hear Boyd laughing from the other side of the forge.

Stiles shoved the rest of the lemon square into his mouth and jumped off the barrel. He thrust his hand into the bag and pulled out a ginger cake. It was warm against his fingertips and the dusting of sugar on the top stuck to them.

He held it out.

"You know you want it. The ginger cake," Stiles said rolling his eyes at Derek's glare. "I got it for you."

Derek eyed the pastry and wiped his hands on his shirt. He tentatively took the cake from Stiles and took a bite.

"Thanks," he mumbled while chewing.

Stiles gave Derek a cheeky grin. "You're welcome." Stiles raised his voice so Boyd could hear as well. "I'll put the rest in the store room for when you have a break."

"Thanks, Stiles!" Boyd yelled back.

"Just so you know," Stiles said, "I bought those especially for you. Totally a bribe. For the love of God, start following my damn system I am creating for *you*."

Derek raised an eyebrow.

"Or for whatever poor sap that has to do inventory next time. I'm recommending to Laura that it be you."

Stiles sauntered back to the building feeling pleased with himself. He worked the rest of the afternoon in blissful quiet except for the hum of the fan and managed to slide out before closing

time, leaving the bag of ginger cakes on the table. When he returned the following afternoon, it was empty.

-

Stiles knew that once upon a time, Derek had a girlfriend. By all accounts, it was pretty serious. So serious that most residents of Beacon Hills assumed there would be a wedding once Derek had finished trade school and his apprenticeship. But something had happened and the girlfriend, Paige, Stiles thought her name was, disappeared – moved away if the rumors were true.

It made the sad skeleton frame of a house on the corner of the huge plot of Hale land all the more depressing.

When Stiles walked into the storage room after another successful little kid tour and found the ornate weather vane he had hauled out a few days before shoved into the far back corner of the closet, the implication slapped him in the face. Normally, the fact that Derek interfered with his work would've annoyed him, but this only succeeded in making his stomach twist and his heart hurt. He should've known, since it was the only one he had found and it was so ornate, so much care taken in the curve of each scroll and the detail of each letter, that it was obviously a labor of love.

Stiles walked into the closet and stared at the weathervane – a manifestation of Derek's romantic hopes. Stiles couldn't imagine it, couldn't imagine what Derek must feel going home every day and seeing the abandoned foundations of the house he and Paige were to share.

Stiles felt sick. He looked around and found a folded drop cloth on a shelf. He tossed it over the offending rooster so Derek wouldn't have to look at it again.

Stiles sighed and went back to his table, drummed his fingers against the wood, mind far away, and it wasn't until Boyd sauntered in and dropped a handful of nails into a box that Stiles realized the room was actually clean. In fact, it was all in order. The only thing out of place was Stiles' paperwork and the piles of old items Stiles still needed to go through.

He stood up quickly, knocking his chair back and ignoring Boyd's arched eyebrow, and stared wide-eyed at his boxes marked for freshly made items all lined up neatly on a shelf and with the appropriate items in them. There wasn't a lock, nail, or hinge out of place.

Derek was following the system.

Derek was *following the system*.

Holy shit.

Stiles felt his mouth pull into a wide, giddy grin.

Boyd rolled his eyes. "If only Derek knew how little it takes to make you happy," Boyd said, walking back out to the forge.

"It's the small things, Boyd!" Stiles yelled after him. He looked around the room again, hands on his hips, surveying it with pride and warmth. "The small things."

-

It was a raccoon living in the closet.

For the record, Stiles did not squeal. He let out a manly yet terrified yelp that was apparently loud

enough for Derek to hear over the ambient noise of the fan and the sound of Boyd's hammer on the anvil.

Stiles barely resisted the opportunity of jumping into Derek's arms and exclaiming "My hero!" when Derek barged in, disheveled and panicked, to save the day, but well, there was a fucking raccoon hanging out in the closet and making growly noises and Stiles was standing on the table clutching a small broom.

"Intimidating," Derek said, looking Stiles up and down.

"Yeah, well, it's all I had in the heat of the moment."

"You know it's just as scared of you as you are of it," Derek said, lips twitching up into a smile.

Stiles scowled. "Yeah, sure. You can put that on my tombstone when I die of rabies."

Derek rolled his eyes. "I'll bury you next to Lester Moore."

"Funny. I almost get bitten by a wild animal and you are cracking jokes. Thanks."

"You're welcome."

Stiles didn't know why, it was probably Derek's deadpan delivery, but he couldn't help but laugh. It started as a chuckle then bloomed into body-shaking laughter.

Derek smiled then, large and beautiful, shaking his head at Stiles before ducking into the closet.

Stiles sat down heavily on the table, legs crossed underneath him, and waited as Derek corralled the small beast. Stiles didn't ask questions as to how Derek managed to get the raccoon to follow him out the door, but he had to bite his lip at how fucking cute it was, tottering after Derek's long strides as Derek escorted it out.

A few minutes later, Derek came back in and did another sweep of the closet to make sure the raccoon didn't have a partner in crime or any babies. Luckily it didn't, but Derek did find the hole it had been using to climb in and out.

Derek didn't waste any time in boarding it up.

But Stiles stayed on the table the rest of the day anyway.

-

Stiles didn't know how much longer he'd be hanging out in the blacksmith storage shop but he knew the end was near. He had already spent over a week of afternoons back there organizing and cleaning and just trying to fulfill Laura's request and enjoying the oscillating fan like a man who knew he would be taking a journey across the desert soon. Or in his case, hanging out in nineteenth century costume giving directions to tourists while standing out in the hot, hot sun.

Now that he had Derek and Boyd helping him with their daily product, he could focus on the other stuff that was just lying around – other than the weathervane. That fucking thing stayed under the cloth in the closet. But there was a bunch of things not easily categorized – special orders that people paid for but never retrieved, like four custom made fireplace sets complete with pokers and ash shovels and hearth stands. They were beautiful and all different, and Stiles had no idea what to do with them except shove them in a box and mark them as fireside tools and hope that was the correct term for them. Then there were the special gate locks with chains and weighted balls which Stiles had almost dropped on his foot. Then there were the nails, the fucking

nails, long and sharp and bigger than regular nails, and heavy and yeah, Stiles got why people bought them – they were cheap and cool and a product of the muscled, gorgeous blacksmiths, but did they honestly need so many? Well, apparently they did, but Stiles was so done with counting them.

Stiles counted out another stack of ten and put them in a small oblong box and marked it with an ‘x’ and set it aside. He started the next ten, his fingers black from dust, and got to six before the door swung open hard.

Stiles looked up to find Boyd striding in heading toward the hidden white phone behind the door.

“Is everything okay?” Stiles asked.

Boyd shook his head. “Lost child.”

Stiles winced. He hated that code. It always made his stomach drop. “Are the parents outside? Need me to help?”

“No, the kid. We found the kid. She just wandered over and told us she was lost.”

Stiles jumped to his feet. “And you left her outside *with Derek*? She’s already lost, do you need to traumatize her too?”

Stiles ran outside before Boyd could answer.

He made it to the front of the forge in record time and ended up skidding to a stop. The little girl, with brown hair and in a pair of purple overalls, sat on the barrel, little feet dangling. Derek stood next to her, talking in low reassuring tones. Stiles maybe melted a bit and it didn’t have anything to do with the blazing sunshine.

“So you liked the horses?”

“They were my favorite!” She waved her hands around. “The man even let me pet her nose even though he said it wasn’t allowed!”

Derek’s lips twisted in disapproval, but his voice remained steady. “That was really nice of him.”

She nodded her head, hair falling into her face. She brushed it back impatiently, her heels thudding against the barrel setting off the lights in the soles of her princess shoes.

“I liked the jail too. The deputy was so pretty and she let me hold her handcuffs! And her badge was shiny.”

“Allison does keep her badge polished.”

Stiles threw a hand over his mouth to keep from giggling. It didn’t help because Derek turned slightly and spotted him. Derek’s easy smile faltered briefly, but he saved it when the little girl started talking again.

“Do you think the deputy will help you find my parents?”

Derek nodded. “Allison is very good at finding lost parents.”

The little girl mimicked Derek’s nod and her expression turned serious. “They shouldn’t have wandered away.” She sniffed and a tear tracked down her cheek. Derek stiffened and his expression turned vaguely horrified.

That was Stiles' cue. He decided to step in, save Derek from the terror of a crying little girl. Stiles had experience with this. He hadn't led a thousand kindergarten tours without learning a thing or two.

"Hey there, Derek. I see you made a new friend."

The little girl stared at Stiles, big brown eyes watering. "I'm Annie. I'm lost."

"I'm Stiles," he said. "And don't worry. We'll get you found."

She smiled at that. "You're funny."

"Thanks. I try."

"Do you know any jokes?"

"Do I know any jokes? Of course, I know jokes. This is your lucky day. Okay, ready?"

Annie nodded theatrically.

"Okay. Why do cows wear bells?"

She cocked her head to the side, confused expression on her face, gnawing on her lower lip. After a moment, she shrugged.

"Because their horns don't work!"

Annie burst into a fit of giggles, hair falling into her face, and she put both hands over her mouth as she laughed. It was so fucking adorable.

"Okay. What do you call a pig who knows karate?"

She shook her head.

"A pork chop!"

Annie roared, her little feet kicking against the side of the barrel. Her laughter rang in the courtyard and Stiles couldn't help but grin so wide his cheeks hurt.

He risked a glance at Derek and was surprised to find that Derek hadn't gone back to work at all. He was still standing right there, his mouth turned up in a soft, little smile and his cheeks red. Stiles noted it, and filed it away for later to examine, locked it up in his thoughts, because if he even thought about it now, he would lose the already tenuous hold he had on his sanity.

"Another one!" Annie demanded.

Derek snorted. "Looks like someone likes your sense of humor."

"Hey, I'm *hilarious*."

"Usually unintentionally."

Stiles resisted making a rude gesture. There was a child present.

"Knock, knock," Stiles said instead.

"Who's there?" Annie asked.

“Interrupting cow.”

Annie’s nose crinkled in confusion. “Interrupting co – ”

“Moo!”

Annie pursed her lips. “I don’t get it.”

Derek burst out laughing, and Stiles couldn’t help the surge of warmth that flooded him. Derek’s eyes crinkled when he laughed, his shoulders shook, and his throat bobbed.

Stiles had to look away.

“Ah, well, it was a bad joke. Let me try again.”

A few more jokes later, in which Stiles managed to get Annie laughing again, Boyd came around to the front of the forge.

“Her parents are with Allison at the Sheriff’s.”

Annie beamed and looked at Derek with wide, adoring eyes. “You were right! She did find them.”

Derek blushed. It had to be a blush. Stiles was sure of it.

“I’ll walk you over there, Annie,” Stiles said.

“Okay. Goodbye Mr. Blacksmith. Goodbye other Mr. Blacksmith.”

Stiles helped her off the barrel and kept his gaze down because he knew he couldn’t handle whatever expression Derek had on his face right then. Stiles took Annie’s hand and guided her down the path.

He risked a glance over his shoulder, but Derek had already turned away. It didn’t stop the butterflies fluttering in Stiles’ stomach at all.

-

The next day, Stiles sprawled out on the grass by the stables. Scott sat next to him, munching on an apple.

“He laughed at the interrupting cow joke,” Stiles said to the sky.

Scott chewed. “It’s a good joke.”

“I’m fucked. Not literally, mind you. But just... fucked. Damn, Scott. I think I’m past it and then I get sucked right back in.”

Scott patted his hand. “Yeah, but for the record, I don’t think you ever were past it.”

Stiles groaned. “That’s not comforting at all.”

-

“So this is what you do all day? Every day? What do you do for fun?”

The lady’s voice sounded like nails on a chalkboard, nasally and heavily accented.

Stiles heard her before he even saw her. He walked down the path toward the forge having just finished his lunch date with Scott. He didn't hear Derek's response, but that didn't stop the next barrage of questions.

"I just love this history stuff. It's so interesting. Do you give private tours? I would pay a significant sum to have a private tour with you."

Stiles rounded the curve in the path quickly and was greeted with the sight of a woman in a tight sundress leaning over the employee-only barrier. Boyd looked up from his task when he heard Stiles' footsteps on the path and gave Stiles the most pleading look Stiles had ever seen. That was saying a lot since he was best friends with Scott and Scott could pull out some awesome puppy-dog eyes when needed.

Derek didn't look up. He kept working.

God, he looked tense. His shoulders were up near his ears, his back hunched, and Stiles felt like someone had punched him in the gut. Derek was the picture of uncomfortable and it made Stiles hurt and burn.

Stiles wasn't quite sure what was going on, but if the usually unflappable Derek was, well, *flapped*, and Boyd was mouthing things at Stiles like *kill me now*, something was terribly wrong.

Stiles came over and hoisted himself up on the barrel. The lady gave him a quick glance, her gaze trailing up from his dusty walking shoes to his nametag, eyes narrowed. Stiles gave her a cheeky grin and she huffed.

"Hey guys," Stiles said, relaxing back on the barrel, giving off a very strong *I-belong-here* vibe.

"Stiles," Derek greeted softly.

"Hey, Stiles," Boyd said. "Good to see you."

"What's up?"

The lady turned away from where she was trying to get Derek to notice her cleavage and leveled an impressive glare at Stiles.

"We were just talking."

"Yeah, I heard," Stiles said with a nod. "While I was walking down the path. Heard every word. And, uh, if you really are into the history thing, I'm your man." Stiles tapped his nametag. "These guys just know the trade side of it. I know the whole town, front and back, top to bottom."

She flipped her blond hair over her shoulder. "I'm really not interested." She turned back to look at Derek. "Anyway, I think what you do is so impressive."

"You know what's impressive? The Sheriff's office. My good friend, Allison, is the deputy. I'm sure she'd love to show you her handcuffs."

She ignored Stiles, his attempts at a diversion falling flat.

"Do you have a girlfriend?"

"Hey, come on, lady!" Stiles yelled. "That's whole levels of inappropriate."

She whirled on Stiles. "This is a private conversation!" Her voice went shrill and frustrated.

“I wouldn’t exactly call it a conversation especially since neither of my friends are actually responding. If we’re going with labels, I’d call it harassment.”

She flushed red, her lips twisting into a sneer. “Stay out of this,” she hissed, shoving a manicured finger into his chest almost knocking him backwards off the barrel.

Stiles really wasn’t expecting it. He squeaked and flailed. He scrambled to right himself before he really did fall off and prove Derek right about the dangers of being perched up there.

She moved in closer and for a split second, Stiles’ life flashed before his eyes. It was kind of pathetic. Death by enraged tourist. He should’ve known.

“Don’t touch him.”

Derek’s voice was soft, but firm, thinly veiled anger trembling right under the surface. She stopped and took a step back and Stiles was able to look over her shoulder to Derek. His jaw was clenched, his pale green eyes burning, and he held himself tense, his muscles poised to jump into action. He looked every inch a predator.

Stiles gulped. He was glad he wasn’t on the end of that stare.

She turned on her heel. “Your supervisor will hear about this!”

“It’s Laura Hale. And my name is Stiles. Make sure you get that right!”

She flicked him off as she walked away.

“Charming,” Stiles muttered.

His heart jumped in his chest and sweat beaded along his hairline. He slid down from the barrel and his knees went weak, the adrenaline leaving his system and making him feel feeble and shaky. Stiles caught himself on the wooden barrier between the exhibit and the forge, leaned against it until he calmed down.

“You alright?” Derek asked.

“Holy shit. Did you see that?”

Boyd snorted. “Don’t you know the first rule of tourists? Don’t engage the crazy ones.”

Stiles laughed. “Yeah. That seemed to be working real well.”

Derek frowned. He made some kind of aborted movement, like he was going to reach out and touch Stiles, make sure he was okay, but his fingers curled back in on themselves.

“She’s going to complain about you. You’ll be written up.”

Stiles shrugged. “I’d rather that than her continue to harass you. Holy shit, Derek. Does that happen often?”

“About once a season.”

Stiles stomach twisted in knots and bile rose in his throat at Derek’s nonchalant tone. “That shouldn’t happen.”

“It’s the hazards of working in a fish bowl,” Derek said with a tight smile.

Stiles thought back to every time he had ogled Derek while he worked. Each time he gazed at his ass or watched the flex of Derek's muscles. He grimaced. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry if I've ever –"

"You haven't." Derek assured. "You haven't, Stiles."

"Okay." Stiles swallowed and nodded. "Okay. I... I need to go work."

"Alright. You sure you're okay?" Derek sounded so sincere, so kind, and Stiles' heart squeezed in his chest.

Stiles forced a shaky smile. "Yeah. Yeah. I'm good."

"Okay. Have a good afternoon."

"I will. You too."

Stiles staggered away a few steps, made it through the small gate without stumbling, hands trembling.

"And Stiles?"

He looked up sharply. "Yeah?"

"Thank you."

Stiles' throat constricted. "You're welcome."

-

That afternoon, Stiles received a call to his cell phone from the Visitor Center's number.

He sighed and answered the call while hunched over his paperwork.

"Hello, Laura."

"Ha! You knew it was me, which means you know exactly why I am calling."

Stiles wrote a number in a column. "How much trouble am I in?"

"Trouble?" Laura asked. She sounded confused. "Trouble? For what? Defending my brother and being almost physically assaulted? You're not in trouble."

Stiles sat up straight, pencil creaking from his tight grip. "I'm not in trouble?"

"No. Of course not. Derek told me everything and I was just calling to let you know I received the complaint and tore it up. Also, checking in on your progress with the work over there."

The knot in Stiles' stomach eased slightly. "Thank you."

"Pfft, it's fine. How's the work?"

"It's going to take a little while longer. There was a lot of crap over here."

Stiles envisioned Laura rolling her eyes. "Boyd and Derek aren't known for their organizational skills. But they're good guys."

Stiles cleared his throat. "They are. Yeah, they really are."

“Good to hear Derek isn’t giving you too hard a time.”

Stiles leaned back in his chair and got a blast of air from the fan right in his face. “Nah, you just have to know his weakness.”

Laura laughed. “Cora told you about the ginger cakes, huh?”

Stiles chuckled, spun the pencil in his fingers. “Yeah.”

“He’s such a dork. Anyway, thank you, Stiles and keep up the good work and we’ll have you reassigned soon.”

“Okay, thanks, Laura.”

He hung up and tried not to think about the sinking feeling in his stomach at the thought of being reassigned.

-

Sometimes, Stiles caught Derek staring at him. It wasn’t a bad stare, more like Derek was waiting on something, maybe, or looking at him to make sure Stiles hadn’t broken, like he was fragile, vulnerable, something that could fall to pieces and not be put back together.

That night – the one with all the howling, the time that Derek had caught Stiles at the Ghost Town after the sun had gone down, and the moon hung full and large in the sky – that night five years ago, Stiles had a panic attack. Derek found him in the parking lot gasping for breath, hands shaking as he tried to dial his dad.

It wasn’t like Stiles was dying or anything. It wasn’t like Stiles had never had one before in an inconvenient place. They happened. Stiles dealt with it. He couldn’t even remember what had triggered the one in the parking lot – maybe some stray thought about how his mom would be proud of him for having a job, or maybe it was some worry about his dad working that night. But whatever brought it on, whatever had turned the air into molasses and set the ground spinning, it had left Stiles trembling against the door of his Jeep, trying to gulp in the cool night air and failing miserably.

Derek found him like that.

Derek called his dad for him, stayed close as his dad talked him down over the phone, and drove him to the station.

It was after that, after that night that their relationship changed. It wasn’t that they really had a relationship before, just an acknowledgement of their mutual existence, maybe a nod in the grocery store, a hand wave walking down the street, a small “hello” when they passed each other at work. But Derek became distant, *weird*, antagonistic even. And Stiles stayed away.

Stiles couldn’t pinpoint what he had done recently to make it change, to make that barrier between them crack then shatter, but it had. Maybe it was the forced proximity, but he could sense it. Not just in the way Derek would chuckle at his jokes, or the small smile that lifted the corners of Derek’s mouth when Stiles brought some ginger cakes over from the bakery, but the feeling was tangible. Stiles felt like he could reach across the distance between them and his fingers wouldn’t crinkle against an invisible wall, but would pass through and he could *touch*.

It was a dangerous feeling.

But Stiles was feeling a little dangerous.

He swung up on the barrel and settled on the lid.

Derek briefly looked up from his work. “You’re going to fall off.”

Stiles snorted. “You’ve said that before. I haven’t yet.”

“Doesn’t mean it won’t happen.”

“Hey, Boyd,” Stiles called.

Boyd lifted a hand but stayed focused on whatever task Derek had set him to that day.

“Erica says ‘hi’ by the way. I think my fourth graders this morning cured her of ever wanting children. They were horrible. You may want to talk with her about that before you get married.”

Boyd didn’t respond, too focused. Stiles merely shrugged and pulled out his phone.

“You guys sure are talkative today.”

“Some of us have to work, Stiles,” Derek said.

Stiles frowned at his phone, trying to beat a level in Candy Crush. “I do, too. I’m just taking a break. You know, I might finally be done in there anyway.”

Stiles heard a discordant clang and looked up to find Derek staring at him. “You’re done?”

“Yeah. Almost. Just in time, too. Laura is assigning me to floater starting next week.”

“That... that... what do you think about that?”

Stiles looked back to his phone. “It’s going to suck. I hate wearing the costume and it gets so hot and I get to be on the first line of all the stupid tourist questions. And I have to be historically accurate constantly.”

“That sounds awful.”

Stiles’ posture wilted a little. “Yeah. And I’ll really miss the fan,” he said softly. The fan wasn’t the only thing he’d miss, but well, Derek didn’t need to know that.

“I’m sure the fan will miss you too.”

“The fan should. We’ve been hanging out a lot back there. I kind of liked it. Save the giant mess and the raccoon.”

Derek cleared his throat. “Yeah, I know the fan kind of liked it too.”

Stiles was fairly certain they weren’t talking about the fan anymore, but he didn’t know how to broach the subject. Stiles didn’t know how to broach anything with Derek really. Yeah, he’d known him for a long time and he’d gotten to relearn things about him the past few weeks, hanging out with him almost every day, but Derek remained a mystery. There were things about him that Stiles didn’t know, that he probably wouldn’t ever know, like how Derek looked in the early morning light, sleepy in the sheets, or how he liked his coffee, or what his favorite movie was.

It made Stiles sad because he’d like to know those things. He’d like to know everything.

Stiles ducked his head and focused on his screen.

“So yeah, I guess it’s back to the real world. Or as real as Beacon City Historic Ghost Town is, I guess.”

Derek huffed.

Stiles fiddled with his phone and bit his lip. He played the game until he ran out of lives and then sighed. He sagged for a moment then decided he really couldn’t avoid what he needed to do any longer. One last check of the boxes he had packed up the past few days and then he’d contact Laura.

With a sad resignation, Stiles half-smiled and patted the barrel. He jumped off then stretched, reached his hands up, cracked his back and yawned. He felt his shirt ride up his stomach and he absently scratched at an itch near his belly button.

There was a clang as if Derek dropped something followed by a hiss of pain and a vehement curse.

“Fuck! Fucking shit!”

Stiles whipped his head around.

Derek’s face was pale, his hand cradled against his chest, body hunched over, jaw clenched.

“Derek? Derek, are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” he gritted out. “Just a burn.”

Stiles ran forward, stopping at the barrier, and leaned over. He reached out, touched Derek’s bicep to steady him.

“Let me see.”

“No, it’s fine.”

Derek’s breaths came in heavy gasps and his body trembled beneath Stiles’ fingers. Stiles tugged lightly on Derek’s arm.

“It’s not fine. Derek, let me look. We need to get it under some water at least and....”

Derek flinched away, pulled out of Stiles’ grasp. “Cut it out, Stiles! It’s fine. Boyd will help me.”

Boyd was already there, standing by Derek’s side, but not making a move. They were both clearly crazy because Stiles saw the fire-red hinge that caused the burn. It was still sitting there on the brick of the forge, the molten metal flaming orange.

“It’s *not* fine! You could have a serious burn! Let me look!”

Derek stumbled back, shoulders planted against the back wall. His chest heaved, sweat dropped down his cheeks, or it could have been tears, Stiles couldn’t tell.

“Derek, you could go into shock. Just let me help you!”

Stiles moved to jump the wooden shelf, his foot already up and over the barrier, but Derek’s voice stopped him, hard as steel, panicked and angry all at once.

“Go away, Stiles! I don’t need your help. I don’t *want* your help.”

For a second, Stiles thought Derek’s eyes flashed blue, but it had to be a trick of the sunlight, had to be, because someone’s eyes just didn’t change color for no reason. It still stunned him though, and Stiles fell backward into the courtyard.

Derek looked away, eyes squeezed shut, and Boyd was there beside him, hand on his arm.

And just like that, the wall between them was back again, solid as ever.

Stiles stood, lump in his throat.

“At least, let me – ”

“Go!” Derek barked.

Stiles jerked back, hurt and frustrated and helpless. It quickly surged into anger. “You know what, fuck you, Derek.” Stiles said, brushing off his pants. “But I’m not leaving here until at least I know you’re okay.”

Derek looked at him, expression raw. With slow, deliberate movement, Derek pulled his arm from his chest and allowed Boyd to look at his palm. Derek kept his gaze on Stiles and Stiles didn’t flinch. He stood on his toes to try to peek at the injury but Boyd blocked him for some reason.

“It’s a small burn,” Boyd said. “I’ll take him to the first aid station in the Visitor’s Center.”

Stiles nodded, throat tight. He knew Boyd had to be lying. There was no way that was a small burn. He’d seen the hinge. Something was going on, but Stiles wasn’t going to push it, not right then. Later. He’d do something about it later, but as much as Derek wanted to pretend he wasn’t hurt, he was, and that was more important.

“Fine. I’ll just... stay here then.”

“You should finish up your work,” Derek said. “So you can go back to the real world.”

Stiles blinked, something hard and cold settling in his middle. This Derek was the one Stiles knew from before, the one Stiles lusted after, but hated. Not the one Stiles had come to know, the one that Stiles wanted to know.

Stiles took a step back. “Fine,” he rasped. “Fine.”

Boyd guided Derek around the gate and then up the path and Stiles watched them until they disappeared.

He sighed and went into the store room and packed everything up, worked until the paperwork was finished, every ‘i’ dotted and ‘t’ crossed, then left, softly locking the door behind him.

-

Though it had taken longer than expected, Laura was still pleased with Stiles’ work, especially with the system Stiles had implemented and the amount of merchandise that had been gathered and reclaimed. It would keep the gift shop happy for a while. She didn’t mention Derek and neither did Stiles. He was still angry and it probably wouldn’t be a good idea for Stiles to bad mouth his boss’ brother.

The school year ended and Stiles stopped giving his morning tours to kids and was moved to

another department. He was officially a 'historic interpreter' for the summer, a floater for the street, and had to pull out his costume - buckskin trousers, a long-sleeved cotton shirt, a pair of dusty boots, and a battered planter's hat with a large circular brim.

He knew he looked ridiculous, but it didn't matter because it wasn't like anyone else looked good in their costumes.

Okay, maybe Allison. Hers was badass. And Scott's was actually pretty nice since his site was so popular and they wanted him to look good. And Isaac really pulled off the shirt garters since they showed off his forearms. And Erica did look nice in the tight bodice and full skirts of the school teacher. And of course Boyd and Derek....

Fine. Everyone looked awesome except him. His trousers felt too tight and his hat flopped in his face more often than not. But whatever. It wasn't like anyone was looking anyway.

Three days in to his new assignment and Stiles kind of hated it. He had done it before, walking around and helping people and giving random information about the town, but compared to giving tours or working in the blacksmith, it sucked. Especially since they were five days into a string of the hottest days on record in a decade.

The summer sun blazed down on Stiles as he gave directions to another group of bewildered tourists and pointed them toward the mining stream. Once they left, he took off his hat and wiped the sweat from his forehead with his sleeve.

The day was hot, *scorching*, and it was only mid-morning.

Stiles missed his fan.

He missed other things too but he was resolutely not thinking about that.

Stiles walked down the dusty street, trying to stick to the meager shade, but there wasn't much. He had forgotten his anachronistic water bottle that day that he usually hid under the stairs to the sheriff's office, and his mouth felt like cotton as he talked to another group. He swallowed, his throat dry and scratchy.

For some reason, Stiles seemed to be in high demand. He talked and would take a few steps and someone else would be asking him a question. He felt swarmed and hot, and time felt like it was passing like syrup. He missed his morning break because he was so busy and the day dragged on, hotter and hotter until Stiles felt like he was in a haze. His lips felt burned and his skin felt tight, stretched taut across his cheeks.

His head pounded, his skull felt too big for his hat. He took it off and fanned himself, but it didn't help. It just felt like he was blowing a gust of hot air into his face.

"Yeah, um," he said, a family of four staring at him expectantly, "the schoolhouse is just down that way." He waved his hand.

The father frowned, looking down at the guide in front of him. "The map says that way," he said, pointing to the other end of town.

Stiles looked around, spun in a circle. The buildings blended together in a drab brown and Stiles felt suddenly lost, *dizzy*. "Right. Sorry. I got confused." He furrowed his brow. He felt his shirt sticking to his back from sweat. A drip ran down the side of his nose.

The family walked away giving him sidelong looks.

Stiles realized something was wrong when he took a step and stumbled, the muscles in his legs cramping, twisting like charley horses. He grunted and made it a few steps to a small shaded area between two buildings. He let his knees give out, let his body fall to the ground and pressed his shoulders against the wooden slats of the building. He panted, his lungs squeezing in his chest.

He didn't know how long he sat there – he was in a fog of shimmery heat – until someone was shaking his shoulder.

“Stiles? *Stiles!*”

Stiles pulled his head up from where it had dropped against his chest. His hat had fallen off somewhere and Stiles wasn't quite sure where.

“Derek?” he asked, squinting against the sun. “What are you doing here?”

Derek squatted in front of him, his face coming into sharp focus. He looked angry when he took Stiles wrist in his hand.

“Your pulse is fast,” he said. He put his other hand on Stiles neck and Stiles tried to squirm away from him but Derek held fast. “And your skin is burning. When was the last time you had water?”

“Not sure. Missed my morning break and I... ugh... why are you spinning?”

Derek's mouth twisted in a frown.

He stood up and Stiles tried to follow the movement with his eyes, but it made him nauseated. His stomach crawled into his throat and Stiles swallowed several times to keep it down.

“Stiles, you have heat exhaustion and could be heading to heat stroke. We need to get you out of the sun.” Derek's words were clipped, voice tight, and Stiles didn't like the way it sounded. Derek shouldn't sound like that. He should sound happy and he should laugh at stupid jokes about interrupting cows.

“So you can help me but I can't help you?” Stiles asked. God he felt fuzzy and wrong. His muscles *hurt*.

“I was fine. You are not. Don't be belligerent.”

Derek held out his hand for Stiles to take and haul himself up, but Stiles took it and pulled Derek's palm close to his face.

“How's your burn?” Stiles' head lolled. He ran his fingers over Derek's palm finding no injury, no scar, just healthy pink skin. Derek sat preternaturally still as Stiles explored Derek's hand, his fingers, even the pads of his fingertips. “No callouses. How do you not have callouses?”

“Stiles,” Derek ground out. “This is not the time.”

“When is the time?”

“Later.”

Derek disengaged his hand from Stiles' exploratory fingers. He wrapped it around Stiles' upper arm and hauled him to his feet. Stiles legs gave out almost immediately and Derek's eyebrows drew closer in concern.

Derek looked scared as he swung Stiles' arm across his shoulders and wrapped the other around

Stiles' waist, pulling him close.

Stiles smoothed his fingertips across Derek's brow. "Don't be upset with me."

"I'm not."

"You are."

"I'm not upset with you. I'm upset that you're hurt."

"I'm fine," Stiles lied.

"You're not."

Stiles let Derek guide him, let his body press into Derek's side, let his head nestle of Derek's shoulder as they left the alley and walked along the street to the employee parking lot. His head hurt and his throat felt like sand and he knew he was sunburned and he had no clue what the fuck had happened to his hat, but at least Derek was there.

"I'm not," Stiles said, once Derek had shoved him into his Camaro.

"Not what?" Derek asked.

Stiles frowned. He didn't know how much time had passed but if Derek had lost the thread of the conversation, it was probably a lot. "Not fine."

"I know."

Derek turned on the air conditioning in the car full blast and directed all the vents onto Stiles. Stiles flinched from the air, too cold on his hot, hot skin, and Derek grabbed Stiles' fingers in his own to keep him from fucking with the vents.

"You need to cool down. Don't touch them."

"You are a blacksmith. Where are your callouses?"

"Not *now*, Stiles."

Stiles slumped back against the leather of the seats and let his eyes flutter closed. He heard Derek on the phone, snippets of conversation, but Stiles couldn't hold onto his words. He drifted for a while, barely aware of his surroundings until the car jerked to a stop and Melissa McCall opened his door, her usually smiling face frowning down at him and her cool hands wandering over his flushed cheeks. She ushered him out of the car and into a wheelchair. Stiles should've protested, but he felt like utter shit, and just sat limply as she wheeled him into the emergency room.

Derek stayed with him, hand firm and steady on his shoulder, while Melissa guided him past the desk and into a curtained area.

Derek held his hand as they made Stiles lay on a gurney and started an I.V. Derek stayed and offered information, talked with the doctor as they placed wrapped icepacks under Stiles' arms and near his groin. Derek stayed while Stiles sipped tepid water and chewed ice chips. Derek stayed until Stiles' dad showed up and then Derek disappeared after one last squeeze to Stiles' hand.

-

Three days of eight hours in the sun, plus forgetting his water bottle, mixed with his Adderall dose

and consequent sunburn from misplacing his hat equaled heat exhaustion on its way to heat stroke and dehydration. Stiles spent a few hours in the ER on an I.V. replenishing his fluids and spent two days at home on the couch and a third day out of work. His dad kept the air conditioning on and a fan running at all times, which was a little overkill, but Stiles didn't say anything.

Laura called him and alternated yelling at him over missing his break and not telling anyone he needed help and cooing at him and telling him not to return to work until he felt like he needed to.

Stiles didn't ask about Derek. Laura didn't offer.

Scott and Allison visited him while he was out of work and they told him stories about the stupid tourists and Scott and Allison held hands while they sat on the couch and watched a movie and Scott smiled dopily when Stiles gave him a discreet thumbs up.

When they left, after giving Stiles hugs, and they laced their fingers, Stiles smiled and tried not to think about Derek's hands.

He failed.

He thought about Derek and his hands. He thought about Derek and the weird flash of his eyes. He thought about Derek's strength and how fast his burn healed.

He thought about Derek's smile.

-

Laura scheduled Stiles for a night program for his first day back instead of anything that involved being out in the sun. It was a ghost tour, which Stiles excelled at. It wasn't stories of ghosts, per se, but old myths from the 1800s that were passed down through the Hale family line. Some were silly, others were eerie, but nothing truly scary. Stiles liked giving that tour. Not only did he get to tell stories, which he loved, but seeing the historic streets at night, with the hanging lanterns outside the saloon, and the myriad of stars, was one of his favorite things.

First though, first Stiles was going to go to the blacksmith and talk to Derek. He needed to thank him at least, even if everything stayed weird between them. Derek had saved him twice, and well, Stiles owed him.

Derek stood at the forge with his arms crossed like he was expecting Stiles. That was odd, but Stiles had learned that there were just some things about Derek that were odd and he accepted that because, well, Stiles was odd too.

Boyd was conspicuously absent.

"Hey," Stiles said. He resisted jumping up on the barrel. It felt like a claim that Stiles didn't have any more. "So, uh, I just wanted to thank you."

Derek relaxed, hands dropping to his sides. "You don't need to thank me."

"No, I do. I was in trouble and you helped me. And you stayed with me. That's twice now, so thank you."

Derek looked away. "You're welcome."

"Okay, then. I have a ghost tour tonight so...." Stiles took a step back, heels kicking up dust.

"Are you feeling okay?" Derek asked. He wasn't looking at Stiles still, but his posture had relaxed

and he... fuck, he was blushing.

Stiles swallowed. "Yeah, I'm good."

"Good. Laura told me, but I wanted to make sure."

Stiles didn't know how to take that. He shoved his hands into his pockets. "Look, I'm sorry about _"

"Can I walk you back to your car?"

Stiles snapped his mouth shut, stunned.

"After your tour," Derek clarified. "After the night program, can I walk you to your car?"

Stiles' heart skipped. "Sure. Yeah, that would be great. Really great."

"Okay... good. I'll meet you after. By the schoolhouse. That's where it ends, right?"

"Yeah, by the schoolhouse."

"I'll be there."

"Okay."

Stiles took a step back, then another, not turning around quite yet, because Derek had looked up, and was staring at him, a blush staining his cheeks, his pale eyes locked on Stiles' face and a slow smile curling its way over his lips.

Stiles grinned, butterflies whirling in his stomach, and almost tripped over a brick in the path.

"I gotta go," he said, jerking his thumb toward the street. "I'll see you later."

Derek nodded and Stiles turned away, smiling and giddy and so fucking confused.

-

The last time Derek and Stiles had been together in the ghost town after dark, Stiles couldn't breathe and he felt like his world was closing in while his hands shook and his pulse raced. This time, he could breathe, which made the encounter a thousand times better already, but his hands still trembled slightly, and his pulse thumped hard in his veins, and his breath caught on his exhales because Derek was there, just as he said he'd be, standing next to the schoolhouse.

The visitors on the ghost tour dispersed after Stiles finished the last tale, a spooky one about echoing wolf howls heard by miners across the countryside, which was incidentally Stiles' favorite to tell. Derek waited patiently while Stiles accepted tips and made sure all the guests knew how to get back to their cars in the dark. Once they were gone, Derek moved closer, stood so his arm gently brushed Stiles'.

"You're here," Stiles said, shoving a wad of bills into his pocket.

"I said I would be."

"I know, it's just, I'm glad. Really confused, but glad."

Derek shifted uncomfortably and Stiles noticed he wasn't wearing his usual blacksmith costume. He wore jeans, tight jeans that accentuated his thighs and a nice shirt with a collar that peeked out

from beneath his leather jacket. He looked amazing and *beautiful* in the weak flickering light from the nearby lanterns, shadows playing on his sharp features.

“What are you confused about?” he asked, hands in his pockets.

“You, for one. You’re confusing.”

“I’m not confusing.”

They started walking down the street, Stiles leading, Derek next to him.

“I beg to differ. You’re like an enigma wrapped in a riddle and dipped in chocolaty mystery.”

Derek raised an eyebrow. “That doesn’t make sense.”

“Your face doesn’t make sense.”

Derek huffed.

Stiles grinned in the dark, pulled his gaze back from Derek’s amused smile to the path in front of him. Stiles slid to a halt.

In front of them, a few feet off to their right, the phantom lantern light bobbed down the street. The rest of the road was dark, the stars and the half-moon the only illumination, so the ball of yellow was stark against the darkness of the night.

Stiles stood quietly and reached out to grab Derek’s arm.

“Look,” he whispered in awe.

Derek looked over, his body unnaturally still. He didn’t shake off Stiles’ grasp and Stiles let his fingers sink into the soft leather of Derek’s jacket.

Stiles had seen the light before, several times, but that was before Stiles began to understand the possibilities of the ghost town, before he experienced Derek’s flash of blue eyes. Now, he had an inkling of what was out there, of what could be real, and to see it now was amazing.

Derek’s gaze darted between Stiles and the light. He looked concerned, worried, but Stiles only felt calm, privileged to experience the phenomenon with Derek present.

“Do you see it?” Stiles asked.

“Yes.”

“Do you know what it is?”

“Yes.”

“Really?”

Derek licked his lips. He didn’t answer for a long moment, just watched as the light floated past them, on its way to a destination unknown. After a few minutes, it flickered out on a small gust of wind.

Derek looked at Stiles once it was gone, his eyebrows drawn together.

“You weren’t afraid.” He said awed, looking at Stiles like he was seeing something new and

special.

Stiles reddened under the gaze but shrugged. “I know it wasn’t going to hurt me. I’ve seen it before. Why?”

“Most people would be afraid.”

“I’m not most people.”

“I know, but....” Derek frowned. “But that night, you, you were panicked. You couldn’t breathe.”

“That night?” Realization dawned on Stiles. “Yeah, I was having a panic attack. I have those sometimes. It’s an anxiety thing.”

Derek looked away, jaw clenched. He toed the dirt with his sneaker.

“Wait. You were there. Did you think I was afraid of something? Of *you*?”

Derek snapped his gaze back to Stiles’ face and stared, his pale eyes reflecting the moon.

“Does this have to do with the burn?” Stiles pressed.

“We should finish our walk.”

Stiles’ mouth flapped open, but no sound escaped, and his hands flailed for a moment. Derek pursed his lips and Stiles pulled himself together on a sigh.

“Okay,” he said. “Okay.”

They walked in silence back to Stiles’ Jeep and when they reached it, Stiles leaned against the door. The parking lot was silent, the Jeep and the Camaro the only cars there. The air was still and warm and Stiles felt something new between them, something deeper than the camaraderie that had been there.

Derek stood close, leaned in, his gaze flicking between Stiles wide eyes and his mouth. It was intoxicating and Stiles swayed closer, licked his bottom lip.

“I’ll see you tomorrow?” Stiles asked.

Derek nodded.

“And you’ll tell me about the burn?”

The corner of Derek’s mouth curled up in a smile. “Good night, Stiles.”

Derek pulled away and Stiles leaned forward, followed the heat of Derek’s body, until he stumbled and caught himself on his side mirror.

“Night, Derek!” he called to Derek’s retreating back. Derek waved over his shoulder and got into his car.

Stiles blew out a shaky breath, want thrumming through his middle. He let his head fall back against the Jeep and he wondered just what Derek was hiding.

Stiles stood in the shade cast by the general store awning, large floppy hat on his head, buckskin trousers and cotton costume shirt present and accounted for, as was his newly issued large tin cup that was supposed to always be filled with water. There were also a set of custom made chairs outside as well that Stiles had been explicitly told to use when needed and a small table for Stiles to keep his historic material on. Laura had been adamant that Stiles stay in the shade, take all his breaks, and drink plenty of water. Stiles planned to. He didn't want another incident either.

He spent his morning talking, doling out information enthusiastically, and pointing visitors toward the different exhibition sites.

He felt good, amazing even, riding a high from the night before with Derek. He still wasn't sure what Derek's deal was, but now he had ideas. They ranged from the ridiculous, like Derek was a vampire, to the slightly more plausible, like the Hales were some supernatural protectors or something. Whatever.

Stiles didn't care. Things were awesome, because Stiles was pretty sure that last night counted as a date.

Derek had leaned in, like he wanted to kiss Stiles. Just thinking about it gave Stiles a little thrill that made his toes curl and his stomach flutter. He allowed himself to imagine more, the press of Derek's body against his, the taste of his mouth, the heat of his skin, the timber of his voice....

"This shouldn't be empty."

Stiles startled and turned around. Somehow, in his daydreaming, Derek had snuck up on him.

"Oh, hi," he managed, shifting, because the trousers didn't hide much and Stiles had gotten a little carried away in his thoughts.

Derek frowned. He picked up Stiles' empty tin cup and poured water into it from the bottle he was carrying.

"You need to stay hydrated."

Stiles smiled. He reached out, punched Derek lightly in the arm. "No worries, big guy. Scott and Allison have come by twice already with extra water. I have drunk so much today I will be peeing clear."

Derek shoved the full cup into Stiles' hands. "Drink."

"Okay, okay." Stiles shook his head fondly. He lifted the cup, the rim cool against his lips, and took a few swallows.

Derek watched him, green eyes locked on Stiles' mouth.

Stiles pulled the cup away and licked his lips, catching the stray droplets.

Derek swallowed, his Adam's apple bobbing. He took the cup back and filled it up to the brim and set it on the small table next to the chair where Stiles kept his maps and brochures.

"You don't have to worry about me," Stiles said. "I learned my lesson."

"I always worry about you."

Stiles flushed. He put his hands in his pockets and looked up at Derek through his eyelashes. Derek was staring at him, looking like perfection, even though he was sweaty and smeared with

ash.

“Was last night a date?” Stiles asked, his heart pounding and palms slick with sweat.

Derek shook his head and Stiles could feel his stomach sink to his knees. He looked away, studied the dusty street. People were milling about, families and employees, enjoying the nice day.

He felt Derek move in closer, felt Derek’s fingers trail over his forearm. “When I take you on a date, you’ll know it.”

Stiles smiled, giddy and happy, and he swayed closer as Derek’s hand moved up his arm, over his shoulder, coming to rest on the back of his neck. Derek’s hands were smooth and dry and his fingers played with the fine hairs on the back of Stiles’ neck.

“Tonight?” Stiles pressed.

Derek stepped closer still, pulled Stiles into the circle of his personal space. He pressed his nose to Stiles’ temple.

“Is that what you want?”

“Yes. Yes times a billion.”

“Okay. Tonight.”

“And you’ll tell me everything?”

Derek sighed. It wasn’t annoyed, more affectionate than anything else. “If that’s what you want, we shouldn’t go out then.”

“My Dad works tonight. You can come over to the house.”

“Okay,” Derek said, ducking his head. His lips were close to Stiles’ ear and his breath sent small shivers down Stiles’ spine. They were out in public, in the middle of the historic ghost town, coworkers and tourists alike all around them, and Stiles didn’t fucking care because Derek was touching him and was warm along his side.

“I should’ve done this last night,” Derek said.

“Done what?”

“This.”

Derek’s hands curled tighter around the back of Stiles’ neck and Derek bent his head slowly. Derek’s lips were warm and soft against Stiles’ stunned mouth, moist and perfect. Stiles pulled his hands from his pockets, flailed them for a moment, until they found purchase on Derek’s waist, fingers tangling in his belt loops. The kiss didn’t last long and it was only a press of mouths together and Stiles didn’t even think he closed his eyes, but it was easily the best thing that had ever happened to him while at work, or ever even. He was going with ever. Best. Thing. Ever.

Derek pulled away, looking as awed as Stiles felt. He took a stumbling step back and Stiles commiserated because his own knees were weak. His lips *tingled*.

They were such a cliché.

Stiles loved it.

“Stay hydrated,” Derek said.

“Stay devastatingly sexy,” Stiles said back, grinning.

Derek rolled his eyes. He turned and walked away and Stiles openly stared at his ass.

“See you tonight,” Stiles called.

Derek stopped and cast a lingering look over his shoulder, burning gaze sweeping up and over Stiles’ frame. “Tonight,” he confirmed, before he turned the corner for the forge.

Stiles plopped into the chair and wondered how he was going to make it through the rest of his shift.

-

Stiles did make it. Barely. He had a hard time concentrating on his job since his mind was off engaging in fantasies about Derek’s abs and his ass and his mouth. Stiles was lucky he didn’t get fired for public indecency since the crotch of his trousers were snug the entire day.

Right at six, Stiles lit out of the historic area like something was chasing him. He drove home recklessly and slid into the driveway. His dad’s cruiser was already gone so he had the house to himself. Stiles ran up to his room, shucked off his costume and showered off the dust and sweat he had collected from work. He jerked off quickly under the spray of the shower to relieve the boner he had sported all day.

He debated over what to wear far longer than what was probably appropriate before deciding on a pair of jeans and a nondescript shirt.

It was only a few minutes later that his doorbell rang. Stiles tripped down the stairs and wrenched the door open to see Derek standing on his stoop.

“Hi,” he said, breathless.

Derek stood there in tight jeans and a tighter shirt with a small grin on his lips and Stiles couldn’t help but pull him in and kiss him. It took Derek by surprise, if the small muffled noise was any indication, but then he sank into it and they were kissing, open-mouthed and hot. Stiles wrapped his arms around Derek’s neck and hung on, insides doing somersaults and blood pumping hard through his veins. They kissed for a few long minutes, Derek’s hands splayed across Stiles’ back.

They broke away and Stiles grinned. “Hi,” he said.

Derek nosed along Stiles’ cheek bone. “Hi.”

“Want to order some food?”

“Sure.”

Stiles called in for Thai and they sat on the couch together and watched tv while they waited. When it came, they spread the food out on the coffee table and ate.

They sat on the couch, pressed together from hip to knee, eating and slurping noodles. Stiles kept getting distracted by the line of Derek’s jaw, and the curve of his ear, and the heat from Derek’s body. He caught Derek looking at him too, sending him sidelong glances that Stiles couldn’t interpret. Stiles could tell Derek was nervous to talk about whatever it was, so finally, Stiles set his carton of noodles down on the coffee table.

“So,” he started, “this is a date.”

Derek snorted. “Yeah, this is a date.”

“Sorry, it’s kind of unspectacular.”

“It’s fine. I like it. I like the quiet.”

“Yeah, after a day of dealing with loud demanding people sometimes staying in is the best.”

Derek nodded.

Stiles licked his lips, studied Derek’s face. He didn’t know how to start. He had so many questions and he was bursting with them but he didn’t know what was appropriate. Maybe he should let Derek start. Or would Derek start? Would Derek say anything without Stiles outright asking? Allison had said that Stiles probably intimidated Derek and for the first time ever, Stiles kind of understood that.

Derek sighed, and set down his own carton.

“Just ask, Stiles.”

“The weather vane,” he blurted then winced.

Derek raised an eyebrow. “That’s what you want to ask about?”

“Well, I’ve been thinking.” Stiles rubbed his sweaty palms along his thighs. “You made it for Paige. Right? It was for the house? But something happened and it has to do with you thinking I was panicking over you that one night. And it’s tied in with the weird shit that goes down at the historic site like the piano music and the rattling carriage wheels. And I’ve been trying to figure it out, but I can’t piece it all together.”

Derek flexed his hands. His face was shadowed, jaw clenched, shoulders hunched. He looked pained and Stiles’ gut twisted.

He flailed. “I’m sorry. Nevermind. I take it back. I don’t want to know anything.”

Derek caught Stiles’ hand and held it, his fingers encircling Stiles’ own in a strong grip.

“I want you to know, but some people... can’t handle it. And they leave.”

“Like Paige,” Stiles suggested.

“Yes, like Paige.”

“I can handle it.” Stiles maneuvered his wrist to where he could lace his fingers with Derek’s. They rested, entangled, on Stiles’ knee. Derek’s skin was smooth sliding along the inside of Stiles’ fingers.

Derek stared down at their hands, his brow furrowed. “You’re not lying,” he said.

Stiles’ eyes widened. “You can tell when I lie?”

Derek shrugged. His grip on Stiles’ hand tightened. “I can hear your heartbeat.”

“Holy shit,” Stiles said. “What else can you hear? What else can you do? You heal right? And your eyes change colors. And you’re strong. Wait, wait.” Stiles took a breath. “Sorry, I didn’t

mean to push, just tell me whatever you want.”

A grin tugged on the corner of Derek’s mouth. “I thought you’d be afraid.”

Stiles made a noise of disbelief. “I’m known for being too curious for my own good.”

“I remember.”

“Hey!” Stiles protested. “I was looking for the bathroom!”

Derek rolled his eyes. “I just told you I can tell when you’re lying. You were snooping.”

Stiles’ mouth flapped open then he snapped it shut. “Okay, note to self, don’t tell untruths around Derek. Oh shit! Does that mean Laura can too? And Cora?”

“Yes.”

Stiles collapsed back against the couch cushions, keeping his hand in Derek’s. “Fuck. That is amazing. Scary but amazing.”

Derek ran his thumb over Stiles’ knuckles. “Stiles,” he started voice tight, “my family....” Derek trailed off. He took a breath. “The light is a ghost and the piano is possessed. And there are other things... supernatural things.”

“Yeah, I gathered. I’ve always kind of known, you know? Too many unexplained things. Not just at the historic site, but in life, in general. You know me, I’m curious as fuck and I’ve always been fascinated by stories.”

Derek rubbed a hand down his face. “You would. Laura thought you would’ve figured it out by now. Cora thought for sure after the night when you had the panic attack.”

Stiles sucked in a breath. “The howling,” he said. “Your family, all the accounts about wolves from the gold rush miners, and that night you were there and there was all that howling and... holy shit.”

Derek shrugged. “We’re werewolves.”

Stiles’ heart tripped in his chest and he shot up to a sitting position. Derek immediately dropped his hand and began to scoot away.

“Werewolves?” Stiles asked. “Holy shit.”

Derek held up both his hands. “Stiles,” he said warily, “you okay?”

Stiles tapped his fingers on his lips. His pulse thudded heavy in his veins. “That explains so much. Micah Hale was one too, right?”

“Some people called hunters figured it out and burned the original house down.”

“That’s why Beacon City became a ghost town. Literally, huh?”

Derek nodded. “Beacon City is a... beacon for the supernatural. My grandmother bought the land to protect the ghosts and things that inhabit here. My mother and father still do.”

“Holy shit.” Stiles stood and paced around the table. His hands shook. Everything was going a little fuzzy at the edges because his world view was tilting. He knew something was going on, everyone did, everyone joked about it because hell, they’d all heard the stories and experienced

the weird stuff, but to have it confirmed was... world changing.

“Stiles, are you okay?” Derek’s voice was far away, concerned and Stiles forced himself to calm down because the last thing he wanted to do was to make Derek uncomfortable. He didn’t want to be a repeat of Paige.

Stiles looked up from where he had been studying his feet on the carpet. “Yeah, yeah, I just. Give me a minute?”

“Take all the time you need.”

Stiles took a few deep breaths, focused on the air coming in and blowing back out. He stood in front of where Derek still sat, hands folded in his lap, on the couch.

“Can you show me?”

Derek gave Stiles a sharp nod.

“Can I?” Stiles waved his hand toward Derek and again Derek nodded.

Stiles climbed on the couch, straddled Derek’s lap, settled on Derek’s thighs. Derek tipped his head back, his eyes glowing blue, and Stiles breath stuttered. Derek’s hands drifted to Stiles’ waist, held him steady, as he stared at Derek’s glowing eyes and his slowly elongating teeth.

“Holy shit,” Stiles breathed. He pushed his thumb against the sharp point of Derek’s canine.

“You keep saying that,” Derek said, his voice thick.

“My vocabulary significantly drops when I experience something that reshapes my world view.”

“I’ll understand if you don’t,” Derek swallowed. “If you don’t want to be with me because of,” he limply waved his hand, “this.”

“Hey,” Stiles said softly, “I don’t know if you picked this up or not, but I don’t care if you were the one-eyed one-horned flying purple people-eater in your spare time. I’m kind of hung on you, dude.”

Derek smiled small and private. Then he grabbed Stiles by his thighs and tipped him over on the couch. Stiles dropped gracelessly, and watched with wide eyes as Derek stood and stripped off his shirt, tossing it in a pile. His body was still sculpted and perfect but Stiles could see the faint outline of hair rippling over him. Stiles was fascinated.

Derek stepped behind the couch and unbuckled his belt. Stiles turned his head to give Derek some semblance of privacy and listened as Derek’s jeans dropped to the floor, the belt buckle jangling. When he turned back around, Derek was gone.

Stiles sat up and scrambled backwards on the couch as he came face to face with a large black wolf. He tucked himself in the corner of the cushions, knees drawn up to his chin.

“Derek?” he asked.

The wolf’s eyes burned blue as it approached and it whined low in its throat as it rested its muzzle on the couch.

“Derek?” Stiles asked again, reaching out and gently brushing his fingertips over Derek’s ear.

The wolf snorted. It jumped up on the sofa and licked Stiles face. Stiles laughed, buried his fingers

in the thick fur around Derek's neck. He stretched out his legs and Derek settled his weight over them, pinned Stiles down with his bulk.

Stiles carded his fingers through Derek's fur, fingernails scratching along behind Derek's ruff.

"You're amazing," he said softly.

Derek pushed his wet warm nose into Stiles' neck and rumbled. Stiles laughed again. He let his head roll back on the couch arm and let his body relax under Derek's weight. He had worked a long shift and had just learned about the existence of werewolves and other supernatural beings. It would make anyone tired and with Derek a comforting presence, Stiles relaxed into the cushions, allowed his eyes to flutter closed.

He fell asleep with Derek curled along his side.

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Stiles woke sometime later to find the afghan from the back of the couch draped over him and a clothed Derek sitting at the end of the couch, Stiles' feet in his lap.

"Hey," Stiles said, voice still groggy. He sat up carefully, rubbed his eyes. "You're still here."

Derek muted the tv with the remote, the light still casting blues and greens on Derek's skin. "I didn't want to leave. Is that okay?" God, he sounded vulnerable and unsure and Stiles wanted to kiss that right out of his mouth. Instead he poked Derek with his toe.

"As far as I'm concerned you can stay forever. My dad might not appreciate that though."

Derek's mouth curled into a smile. "I don't want to get on his bad side."

"Probably not. He's the Sheriff and that means he has access to a variety of firearms. Oh, wait, that might not work on you. You're a ferocious creature of the night. Are silver bullets a thing? What about the full moon? Is that why you don't schedule night programs some nights? Can your entire family change like you can? Is this too many questions at once?"

Derek chuckled. "Yes."

"Yes to what?"

"That it's too many questions."

"Well, you're going to have to enlighten me at some point."

Derek nodded. "Later."

"You always say later. What's wrong with right now?"

"Because right now, I'd really like to kiss you."

Stiles scrabbled across the scant distance between them and fell heavily into Derek's side. "Yeah, I agree. Later is fine. And I'd really like to kiss you too, maybe grope you a little bit."

Derek tugged Stiles close, ran his nose along Stiles' jawline. "That can be arranged."

So they did. On Stiles' couch. In the glow of the tv until Derek's phone beeped with a message reminding them they both had to work in the morning.

-

A few weeks later, after a few dates and many more make out sessions, Stiles was wandering around the gift shop while on a break, giggling internally at the women fawning over the Derek and Boyd postcard and half-thinking about telling them he was the lucky one who got the fondle the ass of Stubbled Perfection, when he tripped over something heavy. It fell to the floor in loud clash and Stiles winced.

“Sorry! Sorry!” he said to the haggard employee. “I’ll take care of it.”

He bent down to right whatever he had knocked over and stopped.

It was the mother fucking weather vane.

Stiles breath caught in his throat and he must’ve let out an audible gasp or his heart stuttered or something because Stiles only had a minute to run his fingers over the elaborate scrolls and curls of the metal and check the exorbitant price tag before Laura was standing over him.

“Stiles? You okay? Your pulse sounds like a hummingbird.”

He shook himself. “Yeah,” he said, voice thick. “Yeah, I’m fine.”

“You don’t sound fine.”

“Are you lie detecting me?”

Laura stepped closer and bent down, helped Stiles right the weather vane and lean it back against the display.

“He brought it to me the other day,” she said, her fingers tapping against the ornate N. “He told me it might as well bring the ghost town some money.”

“That’s good,” Stiles answered.

“Yeah,” she said. She brushed a piece of dark hair away from her face. “He’s been looking at apartments. He’s going to move out of the family home, which is about time. I swear our parents were thinking of evicting him. I think he finally wants a place of his own so he has somewhere private to, well, you know.” She punctuated her statement by nudging Stiles in the shoulder with her arm. It almost knocked him over.

Stiles gulped. “We’ve only been dating a few weeks.”

“Yeah, but he’s liked you for a long time. Cora and I tried to tell him you’d be okay with... *everything*, but Derek is the most stubborn person I know. He was convinced he couldn’t have you.”

Stiles pulled his gaze away from the perched rooster and stared at Laura with wide disbelieving eyes. “That’s ridiculous.”

Laura reached out and messed up his hair. “You’re so cute. I can see why he likes you so much.”

Stiles stared at the weather vane and something panged in his chest, something warm and sharp and on the border of painful, but so fucking brilliant he didn’t really know what to do with it. Stiles had been worrying about the ghost of Paige hovering over their relationship since Derek had told him everything, but the weather vane, the stupid fucking weather vane was sitting in the gift shop and Derek was looking at apartments, ready to move on.

Stiles stood abruptly. "I have to go," he said. Laura didn't stop him as he sprinted out of the gift shop.

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Stiles wasn't quite sure what he was doing but he was glad when he reached the forge and only Boyd was outside working. That meant Derek was in the back building. He brushed past the gate and jogged down the brick path.

Stiles swung the door to the building open hard and stepped inside, letting it slam shut behind him.

Derek stood by the small fridge, drinking a bottle of water. He looked up when Stiles came in, brow furrowed.

"Stiles? Are you okay?"

Stiles didn't answer. His heart was beating a steady rapid rhythm in his chest. He crossed the room, cupped Derek's face in his hands and pulled him in for a hard kiss.

He vaguely heard the water bottle bounce off the floor, but he didn't care because Derek was kissing him back, hard and frantic, and his hands were firm on Stiles' waist. Stiles curled closer, wrapped his arms around Derek's shoulders, his hands tangled in Derek's thick, dark hair.

It was a messy kiss, Stiles opening up eagerly for Derek's tongue, and he clutched at Derek's body, desperate to be closer, to crawl inside him and take up the empty spaces. He wanted that too, he wanted Derek to possess him in a fierce and consuming way. He wanted to drown in it, and burn up in it, too.

Maybe it was the way Stiles shuddered against Derek's body or the panicked clench of his hands, but Derek picked up that something was wrong and he gentled the kiss, ran his hands down Stiles back, soothing.

"What's wrong?" he asked, pressing the words to Stiles' mouth.

"Nothing, I just... I want you to know that you have me. You have me and I want you. All of you."

Derek's eyes flashed blue. "You have me too."

"Good," Stiles panted. "Good."

They kissed again, slower, sweeter, the hint of desperation still there but morphing into a bite of want that had Stiles canting his hips in little thrusts against Derek's hip. Derek made a low rumbling noise as he backed Stiles against the wall of the building, then slotted their legs, his muscled thigh insinuating between Stiles' leg and pressing against Stiles' hard dick.

Stiles let his head thump back against the wall and Derek sucked and bit at his neck, his hands teasing under the hem of Stiles' shirt.

"Holy shit," Stiles gasped, "are we doing this? Are we really doing this in here?"

"Do you want me to stop?" Derek asked, slipping a hand between them and palming Stiles' dick. Stiles bucked into Derek's hand, licking at Derek's lips.

"Fuck no. Don't stop. Never stop."

Derek kissed him again, swallowed down his moans as they rocked against each other. Stiles' dick ached in his costume trousers as he rutted against Derek, chasing friction, chasing release, reveling in the increasingly frantic pistoning of Derek's hips. Stiles could feel Derek's hard cock against his hip and he wanted, God how he wanted to have that fucking him, to feel Derek moving in him, to be pressed skin to skin, the only thing between them air and sweat.

They couldn't do that right then so Stiles took what he could get.

Derek nipped at Stiles' ear, licked along the line of his neck, his breath quick and hot on Stiles' skin. "Come on, Stiles. Want to see you come," Derek mumbled his words into Stiles' jaw. "Tonight, I want to fuck you. Want to stretch you open, make you come on my fingers then fuck you until can't walk."

"Oh my God. Yes. Fuck. *Fuck.*"

It only took one more well-time thrust and Stiles was coming, head thrown back, mouth open as Derek marked a trail of bruises along his neck. Stiles hung onto Derek for dear life, hands clenched hard in Derek's shirt.

Derek growled low, buried his face in Stiles' shoulder, and thrust *hard* twice more before he came shuddering against Stiles.

They stood there for a moment, Stiles idly petting Derek's head, his knees weak, Derek's body the only thing keeping him standing. Slowly, so slowly, Derek pulled away. He looked wrecked, his face flushed, lips swollen, his hair standing on end. Stiles knew he didn't look much better. His neck ached from stubble burn and his hands felt like they were locked in Derek's shirt. He flexed his fingers and did his best to pat down the wrinkles.

"I never pegged you for dirty talk," Stiles said. He sounded hoarse.

Derek smirked. "Never thought you were one for public sex."

Stiles shrugged. "We're learning about each other. That's good."

"I like learning about you," Derek said, leaning in and kissing the smile on Stiles' lips.

Stiles laughed. "You look wrecked, man. No way you can go back out there."

"Neither can you. And I don't know if I want anyone else to know what you look like after you come." Derek cupped Stiles' jaw, ran a thumb over his bottom lip.

Stiles knees went weak. "Fuck. You can't just say things like that."

"I have plenty of other things to say to you." Derek gave Stiles a wicked grin.

Stiles shivered. "Hey, you want to get out of here? Go learn each other some more? My dad is at work and won't be home for several *several* hours."

Derek considered it for a moment. "I have some sick days saved up and I don't think Boyd will mind."

"That's awesome because my pants are so uncomfortable right now and I think the only way to fix that is a shower with you."

Derek laughed again. Stiles decided he liked that sound and would need to hear it every day for the foreseeable future. Together, they crept toward the door and then they snuck out together,

hands clasped, fingers laced, and happy in a way neither of them ever thought they would be.

-

Stiles sat on the hood of his car in the employee parking lot. He had just finished his last day of the summer and he was sweaty and tired, but the sunlight was fading and the breeze was brisk and cool. Derek would be showing up soon to take him out to dinner and then hopefully somewhere private for a little together time which involved orgasms.

Stiles was a fan of Derek-involved orgasms.

He had experienced them a lot over the summer. In many different ways. In many different positions. In many different places, and if he had learned anything about werewolves, other than the fact that they existed, it was that they had impressively short refractory periods. And that was, well, in a word, *awesome*.

Stiles leaned back against his windshield and stared up at the darkening sky and the waxing moon that peeked out from between the trees. He would be heading back to school in the next week to start his senior year and he was anxious and excited about his future, especially now that he had someone to share it with. They didn't have everything worked out, far from it actually, but they knew they wanted to be together, and that, for now, was enough for Stiles.

He stretched out on the hood of the Jeep, a soft smile on his lips as he relaxed amidst the echoes of howls reverberating around the town, the yellow glow of the bobbing lantern light, and the strains of soft piano music playing on the breeze.

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